

I oppose loosening the rules designed to promote and protect diversity of media ownership. These rules were adopted to ensure that the public would receive a diverse range of viewpoints from the media, and not simply the opinions of a handful of media conglomerates.

Nobel Peace Prize nominee Helen Caldicott remarked at a recent speech at Smith College, "It's Jefferson who said an informed democracy will behave in a responsible fashion and this democracy is almost totally uninformed, hence the voting patterns... [Interrupted by thunderous applause]"

You can't fight terror with ignorance. Sadly, the American media is an international embarrassment because of the problems of media concentration and the manufacture of consent outlined by Ben Bagdikian, Ed Herman, Noam Chomsky, Mark Crispin Miller, and countless others. It is my view that Americans have been literally brain damaged by the corporate mass media.

More than ever, corporations -- not people -- determine what information Americans consume every day. The result is a horribly misinformed population.

One problem is diversity. There is a whole range of debate that is completely censored from the corporate media. This has been objectively verified, but this information itself has been censored. Organizations like FAIR and Media Tenor have performed quantitative analysis of news reports to reveal viewpoint bias -- by going systematically through news reports and counting who gets to speak, and what they say. For example, FAIR reported the following in June 2002: "A study of ABC World News Tonight, CBS Evening News and NBC Nightly News in the year 2001 shows that 92 percent of all U.S. sources interviewed were white, 85 percent were male and, where party affiliation was identifiable, 75 percent were Republican."

I have never heard an extended interview with John Pilger, Robert Fisk, Noam Chomsky, Francis A. Boyle, Helen Caldicott, Michael Parenti, Patch Adams, Johann Galtung, Hans von Sponeck, Denis Halliday, or anyone similar on any of the corporate media. We hear from their counterparts every day.

Consider the following recent stories that you won't learn about on NPR, CNN, or the New York Times:

* The human race has only one or perhaps two generations to rescue itself, according to the 2003 State of the World report by the

Washington-based Worldwatch Institute (Guardian UK
-- where I go to learn about the US)

* President George Bush has put the world on a course towards nuclear disaster, according to 1995 Nobel peace laureate Professor Sir Joseph Rotblat (Guardian UK)

* Bestselling green-basher who denied global warming has been condemned as "scientifically dishonest" by Danish Committee on Scientific Dishonesty (Independent UK)

* Preemptive impeachment: Law professor stands ready to draft articles for any member of the House (A-Infos Radio Project)

Michael Powell and the FCC is prepared to further exacerbate the terrible problem of widespread American disinformation by threatening the following rules:

* Newspaper/Broadcast Cross-Ownership Rule.

* National Broadcast Ownership Cap.

* Local Radio Ownership Rule.

* Duopoly Rule.

* Dual Network Rule.

Powell has called public interest regulations "the oppressor." Even Orwell would not have been able to imagine such a pronouncement. Corporations are the oppressors.

I want these rules strengthened, not weakened. I would also like to see Powell removed from his post on the grounds that he is severely prejudiced against the public interest and the value of a free press, and is severely out of step with reality as evidenced by the above remark.

Some considerations:

1. It is nonsense to measure viewpoint diversity in the context of commercial competition. You measure viewpoint diversity objectively by establishing what the various viewpoints on issues are, and measuring the degree to which their proponents are represented on TV.

2. Locally owned and controlled media outlets are critical to our democracy. Chain and network-owned outlets lead to centralization, which is a big part of the mess we are in.

3. Broadcast TV is also critical to our democracy. We need to preserve it so that everyone continues to have access.

4. Ownership limits are absolutely critical to our democracy. I cannot believe that people are even considering doing away with ownership limits, when one examines the effects that media concentration has already had on our democracy.

5. Consolidation has resulted in the media essentially functioning as a PR department for the government and corporations. The public interest is completely written out of the picture.

6. The explosion of outlets has not led to an appreciable increase in quality. What is needed is strengthening of ownership rules and independent publicly-owned media outlets. Also, the corporations need to be forced to pay dearly for their use of the airwaves. It is appalling that they are able to use our airwaves to bombard people with commercials.

7. The FCC should focus on the most powerful and dominant outlets in evaluating diversity. It doesn't count as diversity if a good outlet exists that no one knows about.

Please respond with your position.